Eating well: Lessons from the road.

This week's installment comes from within Brazilian borders. Among the health related differences between the USA and the culture in Rio de Janiero, one thing that is immediately evident is the difference in the diet.

The staple dish at the Brazilian table is rice and beans, similar to cooked black beans in the States. There is usually a salad of some sort, with a simple dressing of oil (think olive oil) and vinegar or lemon put over it. Then there is some sort of a main dish.

One other thing that this country is blessed with is an abundant amount of fruits. Coconuts are very common, and their juice, which contains a healthy amount of sodium and potassium and few calories, is great for rehydrating.

The fruits also are sold on nearly every corner as smoothies—a common juice store will have a list of more than 10 different fruits they can blend with some ice, with or without added sugar, to help you pep up your day.

Even those who are beach bumming can find a healthy drink—guys walk around with a barrel under each arm, one of tea and the other of lime juice. Mix your tea with however much juice you would like and you are set.

All of this not only helps the country seem like the traveler's paradise, it also gives several lessons that we may be able to adopt into our own diet. Beans as a common staple food are high in protein and fiber, which is something that is very much missing from the common diet in the USA.

The salad, without the very unhealthy salad dressing that we smother our salads with in the States, is also high in fiber and nutrients. All too often the salads in the USA are unhealthy and so full of calories and saturated fats from the toppings and dressings that they become less than healthy for us.

While the juice bar is not nearly as common in our country, there are some hints that can be taken from this lifestyle as well. Fresh fruit is an excellent snack. Chips or a candy bars are high in fats, saturated fats, processed sugars and all other sorts of nastiness.

Stop and reflect for a moment after you next eat some fruit, then do the same after finishing a bag of Doritos. I would bet you already can think of the difference in the way that you feel afterwards.

Offering fresh juices is also insightful. Juice without extra added sugar may not taste as sweet immediately, but the flavor is still there. The sugar that we add to juice, morning cereal and desserts, in addition to the salt we add to every other sort of dish, can really add up over time to cause a dramatic increase in the calories we consume and in the salt we get. The little bit extra that we get into our bodies each day can really add up over time.

Justin can be reached by email at Justin.Tyler.Newman@gmail.com with comments or ideas for topics that you may desire to be addressed in this column. The goal of this column is that you find it not only entertaining and informative but also that it creates a desire to take a life-long interest your health and body.